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## Do I have to give my name?

The call-taker may ask the caller's name and phone number in case we have to call you back, or the responders need to talk to someone who actually saw what happened. *YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GIVE YOUR NAME.* Your call will be handled the same regardless whether you identify yourself.

## Now what happens?

Your call is sent to the police, fire or EMS dispatcher. The call-taker may ask to stay on the line with you to continue to update information for in-progress incidents or to give instructions on what to do until help arrives.

## When will help arrive?

The time it takes for a responder to arrive after your call depends on several factors. All calls are given a priority based upon the incident type and whether or not the incident is still in progress. The priorities assigned to each incident type are predetermined by the responding agencies themselves, not by the 911 call-taker. For instance, a shooting or fight takes a higher priority than a loud party or parking complaint. Other factors are driving conditions, how far the unit is from the incident, and how busy the agency is at that time (for example, Friday evenings are usually much busier than Wednesday afternoons). As a result, calls of a lower priority may have to wait.

## I want to know more!

If you would like to arrange a tour of the 911 Communications Center, or if you experience a problem with the 911 system, call Erie County Central Police Services 911 Communications at 858-6227. If you experience a problem with police response, call the Buffalo Police Department at 851-4444.

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## Cell Phones

Nearly 40% of 911 calls are from cell phones. While the 911 system can identify locations of land line phones, it cannot identify the location and number of all cell phones yet. Be sure to give the 911 call-taker your location as well as the number from which you are calling.

## Tips for calling 911

- Remain calm
- Briefly describe the incident and verify your address
- Listen to what the 911 operator tells you to do
- Know your location and call back number (for cell phones)
- Do not hang up until instructed to do so



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# The Facts About 9-1-1

*What Everyone Should Know  
About the 9-1-1 System*



Joel A. Giambra, Erie County Executive

Website: [www.erie.gov/depts/law/cps](http://www.erie.gov/depts/law/cps)

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## What happens when I dial 911 in Buffalo?

When you call **911**, your call is answered by a civilian call-taker whose first responsibility is to find out if this is a true emergency – someone is injured, a crime is in progress, there is a fire, etc. For non-emergencies, call **853-2222**. You may experience a brief wait or you may get a tape recording for a **non-emergency** call.

When you dial 911, the following information about where you are is immediately available to the call-takers. For 911 calls the phone company provides the following information:\*

- ☐ the phone number
- ☐ the address or location of the phone
- ☐ who owns the phone
- ☐ which emergency responders serve that area

\*This includes payphones, but does not yet include all cell phones.

**IMPORTANT!** Your address must always be verified by the call taker! For instance, you may have just moved and kept the same phone number at a different address, or you may be in an apartment complex that lists only one main address and you will need to give further information to the call taker.

Also, you may be calling to report a situation that is occurring elsewhere, so the call-taker will want specific address information about where the problem is taking place.

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## What questions will I be asked?

The call-taker is required to ask several questions in order to give responders an accurate picture of your situation. **It is important to understand that responders may already be on the way while you are talking to the call-taker.** The call-taker is updating the information and relaying it to the police, fire or other emergency service dispatchers who then relay it to the responders.

The call-taker needs to ask the basic 4 W's for every call: Where, What, Who, and When....

**Where?** This includes more than just the address such as an apartment number, floor, suite number, or even the color of your house. Especially important is the nearest intersection, or cross-street, to the address. This makes it easier and quicker for responders to find you.

**What?** This is the basic “bottom-line” of the call. What is the exact problem? Be specific about the immediate problem. Are you in physical danger? Right now? Are weapons involved? Is there a fire? Or do you just need information or a referral? Also, **try to remain as calm as possible**; it only makes the process longer if the call-taker is spending time trying to understand an excited or hysterical caller.

**Who?** This is to identify suspects in crimes, especially if they just left (so responding officers don't drive right past the bad guys!). This means clothing description, names (if known), Vehicle description and last known location or direction of travel.

**When?** It makes a difference if the incident is occurring right now or happened an hour ago, and so a time frame is important.

*If you do not want the police to come to your house, please let the 911 call-taker know.*

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## What information should I provide?

Depending on what your call is about, you may need to provide specific types of information, such as:

### POLICE CALLS

- ☐ suspect description and/or vehicle information;
- ☐ information about weapons or intoxicated persons, for officer safety;
- ☐ whether or not you wish to speak with the officers in person. If you do not wish to speak with the police, please let the call-taker know.

### FIRE CALLS

- ☐ where the emergency is located;
- ☐ what exactly is burning, and whether or not flames are visible or just a smoke odor;
- ☐ if there is anyone trapped or injured.

NOTE: If you are reporting a fire, you will be told to leave the burning structure immediately. **DO NOT GO BACK INSIDE FOR ANY REASON!** Be prepared to tell the firefighters where any hazards or trapped persons are located.

### EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) CALLS

- ☐ Age of the victim
- ☐ If the victim is conscious (awake) and their breathing status
- ☐ The chief complaint (difficulty breathing, bleeding, chest pains, general illness, etc.)

You may be asked if you know CPR. In some cases you may be given instructions on what you can do to help the victim until the responders arrive, including CPR.